

REMARKS

This Amendment is being filed in response to the Office Action mailed from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on May 17, 2004, in which claims 1, 2, 4-12, 14-23, 25 and 26 were rejected, claims 3, 13 and 24 were objected to and claims 27-35 were allowed. With this Amendment, claims 3, 22 and 24 are cancelled and claims 1, 15 and 23 are amended. As such, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of pending claims 1, 2, 4-21, 23 and 25-35.

The Office Action rejected claims 1, 4-8, 11-12, 15-18, 20-22 and 25-26 under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,283,951 to Flaherty et al. (the "Flaherty et al. '951 patent"). The Office Action rejected claims 2, 9, 10, 14, 19 and 23 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over various combinations of the Flaherty et al. '951 patent, U.S. Patent No. 5,571,085 to Accisano, III, U.S. Patent No. 4,917,104 to Rebell and U.S. Patent No. 4,846,174 to Willard et al. The Office Action objected to claims 3, 13 and 24 as being dependent upon a rejected base claim.

Allowable Subject Matter

The Office Action on page 4 noted allowable subject matter as follows:

Claims 3, 13, and 24 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

With this Amendment, Applicants have followed Examiner's suggestion and amended independent claim 1 to incorporate allowable subject matter of claim 3 and independent claim 15 to incorporate allowable subject matter of claim 24 and intervening claim 22. Also, dependent claim 23 has been amended to depend from independent claim 15. Claims 3, 22 and 24 are cancelled. By incorporating allowable subject matter into amended independent claims 1 and 15, the rejections to the claims are overcome and all pending claims are in condition for allowance. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of pending claims 1, 2, 4-21, 23 and 25-35.

Because independent claims 1 and 15 now incorporate allowable subject matter, the anticipation rejections under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) by the Flaherty et al. '951 patent and the obviousness rejections under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) are overcome. Thus, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of pending claims 1, 2, 4-21, 23 and 25-35.

With this Amendment, Applicants have made an earnest effort to respond to all issues raised in the Office Action of May 17, 2004, and to place all claims presented in condition for allowance. No amendment made was for the purpose of narrowing the scope of any claim, unless Applicants have argued herein that such amendment was made to distinguish over a particular reference or combination of references.

Applicants submit that all claims are allowable as written and respectfully request early favorable action by the Examiner. If the Examiner believes that a telephone conversation with Applicants' attorney would expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is cordially invited to call the undersigned attorney of record.

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Respectfully submitted,



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